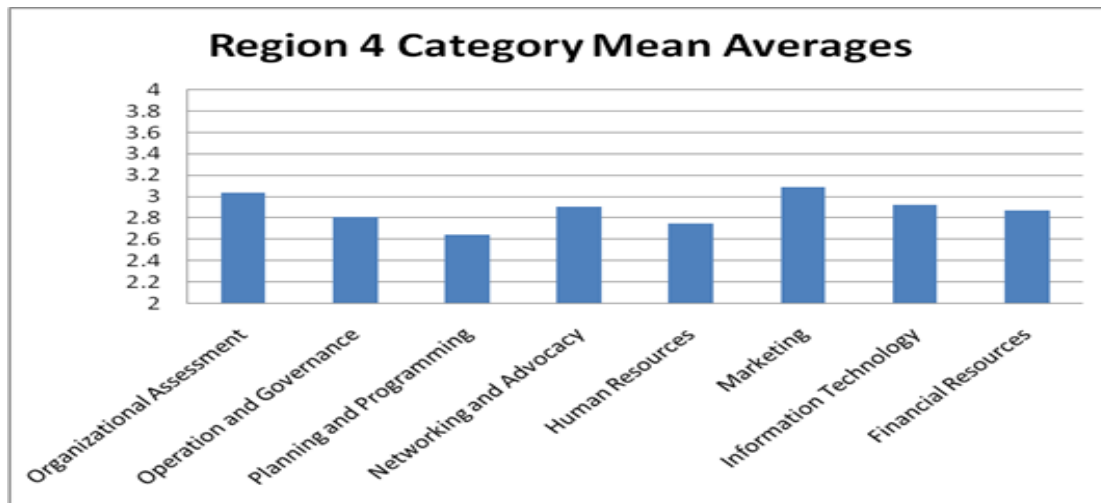


Chapter 10 – Northeast IN: Region 4 Findings

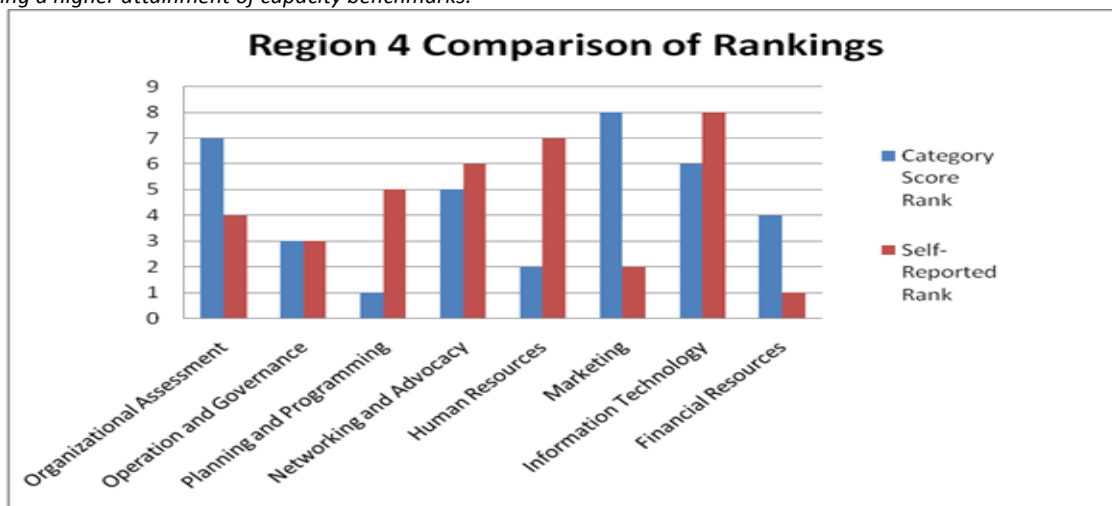
Region 4 is made up for 20 counties^[1]. It contains the city of Fort Wayne in Allen County, the second largest city in the state, along with a few other smaller urban centers like Muncie, Richmond, and Huntington. Much of the region is rural and agriculture has a large presence, though it does not account for much for the workforce. Many areas are dependent upon the manufacturing sector which has been hurt lately by the economic recession, causing increased unemployment rates. As with the entire state, this leads to increased reliance on social services provided by FBCOs. Though the sample of organizations here is not representative of all nonprofits in the region, it is clear that there are significant issues with capacity that must be addressed for nonprofits to be best able to serve the population of Northeast Indiana.

A total of 29 organizations located in Region 4 completed the survey in its entirety, and over half (56.7%) are faith-based. The services provided are targeted mostly for families in general, but others serve only adults or only children of all ages. These organizations have a wide range of issues they are concerned with: 15 of them address the needs for food and nutrition, and 14 have mentoring services. Another 14 help with community development, and 12 provide services related to job and skills training. Areas of service that are less addressed are domestic violence, disaster preparedness and response, and inmate reentry. Based on the added scores for whole survey, 13 of the 29 are high capacity, 14 are in the middle level range, and only two are low capacity.

^[1] Adams, Allen, Blackford, De Kalb, Delaware, Grant, Henry, Howard, Huntington, Jay, Kosciusko, Lagrange, Miami, Noble, Randolph, Steuben, Tipton, Wabash, Whitley, Wells.



Graph 10.1: Shows the categorical mean averages of Northeast Indiana. All scores on are a scale of 0-4 with a higher score reflecting a higher attainment of capacity benchmarks.



Graph 10.2: Shows the comparison of the rankings between the categorical scores from the survey sections and question 10.1 in which respondents were asked to rank the areas of capacity from least challenging to most challenging using numbers 1-8. A higher number reflects either a higher capacity or a perceived higher capacity.

Ch. 10.1 – Strengths

Referring to Graph 10.1, the data show that the two biggest strengths of the participating organizations of Northeast Indiana are Marketing and Organizational Assessment. These two categories are the only ones scoring above a 3.0, showing that more than the majority answered “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” for most of the questions. Specifically looking at Marketing, the averages for the 4 questions fell between 3.1 and 3.24 except for question 7.4 referring to the use of varied types of media to educate the community about the existence, mission, and programs of the organization. The mean average for this question was only 2.83, which probably reflects that the respondents feel that there are

more avenues to market their organization than they are currently using. Question 7.5 asks them to list the types of media used, and most organizations list common examples like newspaper, radio, TV, brochures and flyers, speaking at community events, and others. Of the 29, only four mention any use of social media like blogs, Facebook, or Twitter, a hot topic in the world of nonprofits. Though they do well with meeting the basic achievements of Marketing, according to their rankings to the Self-Reported rankings, question 10.1, the respondents rank it as their second most challenging area of capacity as seen in Graph 10.2. This could signify that they have better ideas for how to market their organization, and may lack the financial or technical resources to do so.

The second highest scoring category is Organizational Assessment. Of the individual questions, they score highest (3.28) in question 2.1, in that they have a process of reviewing and responding to ideas, suggestions, comments, and perceptions from all staff members, volunteers, and clients. Interestingly, in this section, respondents average lowest in question 2.3 with only 2.38. This question asks if all stakeholders are involved in the evaluation of the organization's progress toward benchmarks and goals. It seems that these organizations are disjointed in that they respond to their stakeholders' ideas and suggestions at the time, but do not integrate those comments or seek further information from these stakeholders during a more formal evaluation. In designing this survey, we understood "stakeholders" to be even more comprehensive than only referring to staff, volunteers, and clients. The local community is a stakeholder, and key leaders ought to be consulted on the direction and programs of the organization, along with others. Despite scoring well in the category, the respondents ranked Organizational Assessment fourth in the self-reported question. This could mean that they recognize a need to more fully evaluate their operations, and such enthusiasm ought to be applauded.

Ch. 10.2 – Challenges

Looking at the participants' biggest capacity challenges, Graph 10.1 shows that the two lowest scoring categories are Planning and Programming and Human Resources with mean averages of 2.64

and 2.74, respectively. Within Planning and Programming, organizations score lowest in questions 4.4 (“The organization has established an evaluation process and performance indicators toward the achievement of its goals and objectives.”) and 4.5 (“Those receiving services participate in program development.”). These questions contradict the findings in the previous section about Organizational Assessment. They should score higher for the question 4.4 about program evaluation. But the response to question 4.5 about clients having a role in program development matches the results from question 2.3 about all stakeholders being involved in the evaluation process. It appears that one of the main groups ignored is the clients themselves. This can be very dangerous for an organization. It can turn providing social services into patronizing the clients who are prevented from communicating their needs. To take this comparison with the Organizational Assessment findings further, there is more confusion because if these nonprofits are so good at assessing their organization, why is that knowledge not translated into better plans and programs? Even though Planning and Programming is absolutely central to a nonprofit’s long-term sustainability, it appears that they undervalued this area in their rankings of the category, ranking it fifth. This transition becomes a crucial element of concern.

The second area of weakness is Human Resources. This area is more comprehensive, containing questions related both to staff and volunteers, which are obviously of prime importance for nonprofits. In fact, their weaknesses in this area are found in the lack of employee performance reviews (question 6.2) and the lack of a volunteer management plan (question 6.3). Similar to Planning and Programming, it appears that these nonprofits do not recognize their low capacity in Human Resources. Looking at the graph comparing the category averages to the self-reported rankings, the respondents feel that it is their second to least challenging area. As these are small grassroots organizations, it may be difficult to objectively evaluate the staff and volunteers because they are the lifeblood of the nonprofit’s operations. Some respondents do not even have paid staff at all and are run entirely by volunteers. In

such cases, it is even more important to have clear and written rules, job descriptions, and plans for managing the volunteers.

Ch. 10.3 – Solutions

Most of these organizations rank Financial Resources as their biggest challenge, but in many instances, a financial issue is not directly a financial shortcoming or problem. Capacity building does take money, for example, for additional training for the staff or hiring a consultant, but many organizations with plentiful financial resources could suffer from misdirected or misused funds. The proper management of finances is necessary to even be considered for grants and to be regarded as trustworthy by donors. But simply getting more money, without first resolving these other challenges with capacity, is fruitless. For this reason, skills like grant-writing should be less of a focus until the organization is at a high enough capacity to use more money effectively. Though Region 4's respondents recognize it as its biggest challenge, probably due to the tight financial situation in these economic times, it is clear that the main sources of concern for these organizations are not in their bank accounts.

With challenges in areas of Planning and Programming, Human Resources, and also in Operations and Governance, the respondents need to build their capacity in order to effectively provide services, be competitive for grants and funds, and ensure lasting change in their communities. Resolving the weakness in their second most challenging area, Human Resources, can be the key to solving many of their problems. Well-trained volunteers can use their skills and passion to create better programs, motivate the staff, increase fundraising, expand marketing, and more. Additionally, boards may need regular training and orientation to stay as dynamic and flexible as the organizations they oversee. There are many general best practices that these boards need to adopt to be the true leaders of these organizations. Once the board, staff, and volunteers have their own capacity built, the rest of the changes will come more easily. Intense dedication first to the internal operations of the nonprofit in both Human Resources and Operations and Governance needs to be the first step.

After the human capacity of the organizations is built up, their strength in Organizational Assessment can be utilized to build the capacity of their Planning and Programming. If these nonprofits are really knowledgeable about their own operations, they must merely take the risk to make the changes needed to be more effective. The programs are the entire purpose of an organization, so getting feedback from the clients, community members, volunteers, and staff is useless if those comments are not changing the programs. Their effective marketing strategies will be needed to advertise the new direction of their programs, and the community should be enthusiastic about the enhanced programs if they were consulted in the program development.

One key asset that can provide sustainable effects is the strong nonprofit infrastructure in the region. There are several nonprofit associations that are specialized for particular needs. One example is the Northeast Indiana Nonprofit Alliance (NINA). It provides educational seminars, a leadership program for nonprofit professionals, mentoring opportunities, and more. Another significant resource is the Paul Clarke Nonprofit Resource Center located in the Allen County Public Library's main branch. It serves as a hub for nonprofits, offering workshops on topics like grant writing and has a library of books and other resources concerning all aspects of nonprofit management. It also offers professional consulting services and has good relationships with other agencies and associations serving the nonprofit community. Some small grassroots organizations, like the ones who participated in this survey, may not be plugged in to this infrastructure where they can access all types of assistance. These opportunities for networking, collaboration, and sharing of best practices can strengthen their organizational capacity at a low cost or even no cost. One problem is that most of these associations are located in Fort Wayne. As the urban center of the region, organizations physically located further from the city may have difficulty becoming integrated. However, this can provide an opportunity for new associations and relationships to build in the more rural areas outside of Allen County following the example of the ones already in existence.

Ch. 10.4 – Additional Region 4 Resources

Northeast Indiana Nonprofit Alliance: <http://www.leadershipfortwayne.org/programs/NINA/index.html>

Paul Clarke Nonprofit Resource Center (PCNRC): <http://www.acpl.lib.in.us/nrc/index.html>

Paul Clarke Nonprofit Resource Center's blog: <http://pcnrc.wordpress.com/>

Northeast Indiana Association of Volunteer Administrators: <http://www.niavaonline.org/NIAVA.html>

<http://www.neindianaunitedway.com> - Northeast Indiana United Ways. Counties: Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Grant, Huntington, Jay, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, and Whitley.

United Way of Delaware County: <http://www.invitedtoliveunited.org/>

United Way of Howard County: <http://www.unitedwayhoco.org/>

United Way of Miami County: <http://www.uwmiamip.org/>

United Way of Madison County: <http://www.unitedwaymadisonco.org/>

Henry County United Fund: <http://www.unitedfund.com/>

Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network (INRN)

North Region: Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, LaGrange, Kosciusko, Noble, Steuben, Whitley, Wabash, Wells

East Region: Blackford, Delaware, Grant, Henry, Jay, Randolph

Western Region: Howard, Miami, Tipton <http://www.inrn.org/west/west.htm>